

Are postmodern philosophies methodologically invalid? An assessment of Habermas' argument

Ivan Catanzaro¹

¹ Universität zu Köln, Master's degree student in Philosophy (2024-2025)

Matrikelnummer: 7429821. Mail: ivan.catanzaro@outlook.com; icatanza@smail.uni-koeln.de

Submitted the 27 March 2025 as a term paper for the course *Französische Philosophie der Postmoderne und ihre deutsche Genealogie* by Sidonie Kellerer and Wolfram Nitsch.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Presenting Habermas' argument (HA) and the Postmodern stance.....	4
2.1 Heidegger's <i>Meditative thinking</i>	
2.2. Foucault's <i>Genealogy</i>	
3. Critical assessment of HA weighed against the postmodern stance.....	9
3.1 Heidegger's extra-rational metaphysics	
3.2 Foucault's Nietzscheanism	
4. Conclusion	17
5. Bibliography.....	18
6. Declaration of academic integrity	21

1. Introduction

Postmodern² philosophies have been subjected to several critiques in the last decades coming from multiple angles, I assert that this fact alone commands the undertaking of a deeper analysis of the methodology employed by them, chiefly since their influence in particular within academia grows.

Among the various critiques of postmodernism the most comprehensive³ is the one articulated by Jürgen Habermas (1929), here we will focus on his work *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures (Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen, 1985)* and more precisely on *Lecture XI*. We will analyze his argument about methodological inconsistency refuting the claim to epistemic status outside rationality as invalid and determine its soundness.

This is the outline of the paper. I will start by presenting Habermas' Argument (HA) and independently the postmodern stance of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) towards which it is directed (Sect. 2). I will then evaluate the postmodern stance and critically assess HA soundness by testing it on my conclusions (Sect. 3).

² Postmodern is a controversial and ambiguous label. Here it is meant broadly as an umbrella term for those philosophers promoting an overcoming of modernity. For more information Cf. Gary Aylesworth. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2021 Edition. Stanford University, 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/> (accessed March 15, 2025).

³ Aylesworth. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. § 9. Habermas' critique.

2. Presenting Habermas' argument (HA) and the Postmodern stance

Habermas argues that postmodernism in general, and Foucault's thought in particular, fall victims to methodological aporias.⁴ They attack *reason* through the perspective of some *other* which has been excluded from its discourse, but in order to do so, our author points, they still need to perform an *act of reason*⁵. Hence, their claim to employ a *special discourse* operating outside of rationality⁶, without yet being irrational (viz. *meditative thought* and/or *Andenken* and *genealogy*), is invalid. We can therefore formalize HA in the following façon:

HA. Methodological inconsistency: claiming epistemic status outside of rationality is invalid.

We will in the succeeding two paragraphs, in order to assess HA in the most rigorous manner, try to represent as correctly and neutrally as possible, the respectively objected Heidegger's and Foucault's claims as they are articulated.

2.1 Heidegger's *Meditative thinking*

In *Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'* (GA5:267)⁷ (translated as *The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is dead'*⁸), at the very end of the work Heidegger claims reason to be *the most stiff-*

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 309. "Whereas Heidegger remains reticent about the kind of privilege that is his - so that one is not sure of how the genre of his late philosophy could be judged in any sense - Foucault has carried out his work unpretentiously to the very last, in the awareness of being unable to dodge his methodological aporias."

⁵ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 308 "Reason is supposed to be criticizable in its historical forms from the perspective of the other that has been excluded from it; this requires, then, an ultimate act of self-reflection that surpasses itself, and indeed an act of reason for which the place of the genitivus subjectivus would have to be occupied by the other of reason."

⁶ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 308 (again) "Whether in the form of meditative thought [Andenken] or of genealogy, Heidegger and Foucault want to initiate a special discourse that claims to operate outside the horizon of reason without being utterly irrational. To be sure, this merely shifts the paradox."

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot"*, in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe Band 5* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 267. "Das Denken beginnt erst dann, wenn wir erfahren haben, daß die seit Jahrhunderten verherrlichte Vernunft die hartnäckigste Widersacherin des Denkens ist."

⁸ Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God Is Dead'," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), Part 2, 31. "Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought."

necked adversary of thought⁹. He understands reason to pursue a superficial thinking, which is oriented towards the grasp of truths about entities – to which he opposes the *poetic thought*, who contrary to reason does not concern itself about the truths of entities, but rather about the truth of being.

Heidegger will later expand on his distinction between the two aforementioned modes of thought [essential and superficial/inessential] through the analysis of the poem by Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) *Andenken* [Remembrance]¹⁰. In it he sees a way of thinking as remembrance [Andenken]¹¹ that is required in order to properly understand the poem; Heidegger argues that the poem is only superficially about the author's personal recollections, in actuality it regards the nature of *poetic thought* itself. This alternate way to think, he associates it with pre-Socratic philosophy as it is not preoccupied with distinctions among things¹² and thus characterizes it as pre-rationalist¹³.

Consequently, this remembrance constitutes a renewed union of philosophy [λόγος] with poetry [μῦθος], where instead of propositions being asserted on things, their significance or being is apprehended¹⁴. Subsequently, he will come to contrast thinking itself or later *meditative thinking* to *calculative thinking*, the latter obeying logical and mathematical rules and being the dominant form of thought in our technological age. To be sure, he declares these to be the two kinds of thinking, both needed and justified, with the first contemplating about the meaning of everything that is (GA16:519)¹⁵.

A major worry of Heidegger is that the second kind of thinking may become in the future the only existent form, so that the human will lose his *special nature* and in his

⁹ For a succinct presentation of Heidegger's theory of thought Cf. Pierre Keller, "Thinking (Denken)," in *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, ed. Eric S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)

¹⁰ Keller, *Thinking (Denken)*, 746-752.

¹¹ Notice that in the original German language, *An-denken* is a wordplay formed by *Denken* [to think] and *An*, a proposition translatable in this case as [on].

¹² Keller, *Thinking (Denken)*, 746-752. Ibidem.

¹³ Rationalism in a wide sense. The prefix pre- is not necessarily to be understood chronologically. For an extensive overview of Heidegger's thought Cf. Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006) as well as my own work commenting on the former author views: Ivan Catanzaro, *La topologia del primo Heidegger* (Academia.edu, 2024) https://www.academia.edu/125139930/La_topologia_del_primo_Heidegger_Ivan_Catanzaro [in italian]

¹⁴ Keller, *Thinking (Denken)*, 746-752. Ib.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)*, *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 16, 519. "Das rechnende Denken ist kein besinnliches Denken, kein Denken, das dem Sinn nachdenkt, der in allem waltet, was ist."

ingenious planning will achieve total thoughtlessness. His concerns are connected to the rise of technology and what he perceives as our inability to think outside of the box of our current historical epoch. The forces at work in threatening our earth are manifest our forsaken relationship to being¹⁶.

2.2 Foucault's *Genealogy*

Most scholars convene that Foucault's *genealogy* derives primarily from the work *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift*, 1887) by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)^{17 18 19}. Therefore, the methodology employed by Foucault is expressly *Nietzschean* in nature, as the former was (albeit not merely) an *erudite scholar* of his²⁰.

To Foucault *genealogy* is not opposed to history itself (but more precisely to historiography)²¹ and is denoted by a rejection of *metahistorical ideals* and *indefinite teleologies*²². It is a historical-philosophical²³ method aimed at challenging *essentialism*²⁴, hidden residual implications²⁵. Its performance is connoted by *disturbing* what is considered

¹⁶ Keller, *Thinking (Denken)*, 746-752. *Ib.*

¹⁷ Yvonne Sherratt, "Foucault," in "Theory of Genealogy," Part II: *The Tradition of Genealogy*, in *Continental Philosophy of Social Science: Hermeneutics, Genealogy, and Critical Theory from Greece to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 143–148.

¹⁸ Daniel Lichtenstein, "Explanation and Evaluation in Foucault's Genealogy of Morality," *European Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (September 2023): 732, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12809>.

¹⁹ Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, § "Archaeology and Genealogy," Stanford University, last modified September 22, 2021, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#ArchGene>.

²⁰ Sherratt, *Continental Philosophy of Social Science*, 145

²¹ Michel Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971, p. 160. "L'histoire « effective » se distingue de celle des historiens, en ce qu'elle ne s'appuie sur aucune constance"

²² Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 140. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. "genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosophers might compare to the mole like perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origins"

²³ The historiographic or scientific validity of the genealogical method is contested. Cf. Daniel Lichtenstein, "Explanation and Evaluation in Foucault's Genealogy of Morality,". Additionally, Foucault's conception of history is mainly informed by Heidegger's *Wirkliche Historie* and in turn from Nietzsche's historical theory expressed in *Untimely Meditations*, rather than mainstream academic historiography *per se*.

²⁴ The essentialism here discussed, is the one informing the *theory of forms* of Plato, which Nietzsche sees as holding indirect influence through Christianity's *inheritance* of some versions of it. For more information on the topic Cf. Friedrich, Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

²⁵ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 142. "Why does Nietzsche challenges the pursuit of the origin (Ursprung), at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an

immobile, fragmenting what is considered unified and finally demonstrating the heterogeneity of what is believed to be consistent²⁶. The inherited content of genealogy is not conceived as an acquisition or possession, on the contrary is described as an *unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers*, threatening the *fragile* inheritor from *within* or from *underneath*²⁷. He completely rejects the concept of constancy, arguing that nothing in humans is enough fixed as to allow understanding other humans and/or identifying with them²⁸. Additionally, genealogy must systematically smash every idea that makes possible an apprehension of history as a totality and/or continuous movement – it must *break into pieces* the *consoling* illusion of there being some continuity in the historical becoming²⁹. Thus, knowledge in the historical realm does not mean to recognize and especially does not mean to recognize us into others³⁰. History will be *effective* insofar as will be capable of introducing the discontinuous into our own being.³¹

The forces shaping history are not the effect of some mechanistic efficient cause, nor follow a specific progression towards, such as a final cause, instead they are the random unintended outcome of the struggle for power^{32 33}. In the end, Foucault sees a single constant or identifying nature for all historical events and that is *power*, again a direct emanation of Nietzsche's theory³⁴. He clarifies his conception of randomness by distinguishing it from chance as it is commonly understood, i.e. as a passive force, and connoting it actively; as both the attempt of the agents' will to power to impose order and control over

attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to 'that which was already there', 'the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature', and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity. However, if he listens to history, he finds there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."

²⁶ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 146. "The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself?"

²⁷ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", *ibidem*.

²⁸ Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." p. 160.

²⁹ Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." *Ib*.

³¹ Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." *Ib*.

³² Foucault. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." 161

³³ The idea of struggle for power is clearly informed by Nietzsche's main metaphysical theory of the *Will to power* [*Wille zur Macht*]

³⁴ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 151.

chance and paradoxically the subsequently increased chance generated by this attempt³⁵. As a consequence, our present does not rest on profound intentions, our existence is a case among countless lost events³⁶.

Finally, Foucault follows Nietzsche's *historical nominalism* to its radical conclusion as regards all *essentialist* concepts (e.g. the body, the self, truth, feelings etc.; viz. fixed essences and inherent identities); as the outcome of history they are all the product of the interweaving between mere chance and the struggle to dominate.

³⁵ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 155.

³⁶ Foucault. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Ibidem.

3. Critical assessment of HA weighed against the postmodern stance

3.1 Heidegger's extra-rational metaphysics³⁷

To understand Heidegger's stance we must comprehend it as being constantly informed by his major metaphysical theory viz. the *ontological difference*³⁸. Indeed, apparent definitions such as *meditative, essential, poetic etc. thought* are but mere indications³⁹ which may be aptly used synonymously to refer to being⁴⁰. His theory fundamentally argues there to be a radical difference between the nature or substance of an entity and the entity itself; rational inquiry is preoccupied in defining properties of entities which are already given, without truly worrying about their nature, rather already assuming it. So his primary argument may be formalized as follows:

P1. There is a fundamental distinction between the substance of an entity and its corresponding entity.

³⁷ Here I do not use the idiosyncratic definition of metaphysics employed by Heidegger, which was it the case would have preferred the term *ontology*. I employ it as a descriptive term as it is regularly used in the literature.

³⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, xi. "At the heart of Habermas's disagreement with Heidegger and his followers is the putative "ontological difference" between Being and beings, between world-view structures and what appears within these worlds. In Habermas's view, this distinction is deployed so as to uproot propositional truth and devalue discursive, argumentative thought. After hypostatizing the world-disclosive aspect of language and disconnecting it from innerworldly learning processes, Heidegger leaves us with a kind of linguistic historicism, outfitted with the quasi-religious trappings of a "truth-occurrence," a "destining of Being," to which we can only submit in an attitude of "expectant indeterminacy." Habermas argues that this construal misses the dialectical interdependence between a historically shaped understanding of the world and the experience and practice possible within its horizon. Innerworldly practice is indeed informed by general, pregiven structures of world-understanding; but these structures are in turn affected and changed by the cumulative results of experiencing and acting within the world. Social practice submits the background knowledge of the lifeworld to an "ongoing test" across the entire spectrum of validity claims. Meaning cannot be separated from validity; and it is precisely the orientation of actors to validity claims that makes learning processes possible - learning processes that may well cast doubt on the adequacy of the world views informing social practice."

³⁹ Keller, *Thinking (Denken)*, 746-752.

⁴⁰ Being was described as synonymous and equivocal by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, a definite influence on Heidegger's theory of being. For more on the topic Cf. F. Brentano, (ed.) T. Binder & A. Chrudzimski, "Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles" (1862, 2014); F. Brentano, (tr.) R. George, "On the several senses of being in Aristotle" (1975, Berkeley University Press) [English translation] as well as my own review of the work: Catanzaro "On Being according to the Figures of the Categories from "On The Several Senses Of Being In Aristotle" By Franz Brentano" (2025)

P2. The philosophical field of metaphysics should inquire about the substance of entities, while -physics [science] inquires on entities.

C1. As rational inquiry pertains to entities through conceptual definitions, it fails methodologically to grasp the substance of entities and hence should be abandoned by metaphysics.

C2. Instead metaphysics should adopt an essential pre-rational thought as the method of inquiry which can be synonymous with poetry or other forms of art.

Now that our picture is clearer Heidegger's stance acquires more meaning and justification, as it shows it to be the result of rather complex elucubrations, rooted in the tradition of philosophical practice. Although, clearly producing extravagant consequences which we will now analyze thoroughly. If we carefully analyze C1 we will find that it is not far from the conclusion reached already by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his famous work on metaphysics the *Critique of Pure Reason* and by many related subsequent theories by metaphysicians directly or indirectly influenced by him⁴¹. What is crucial to Heidegger theory is C2 and it is what arguably qualifies as problematic in its theorizing and is the main point of the accusation of invalidity by Habermas⁴². Kant and Wittgenstein in order to preserve rationality abandoned the ambition to secure respectively the *Thing in itself* [das Ding an Sich] and *The contemplation of the world sub specia æterni*⁴³. On the opposite Heidegger although starting from a similar premise, not only decides to secure his *Beyng* epistemically, but because this is not possible through rational inquiry (arguably a necessary condition for knowledge as *justification*⁴⁴) decides to found (or re-found) a non-rational *episteme*.

⁴¹ One clear example is Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and his major work on metaphysics the *Tractatus*. For additional discussion on this entanglement Cf. a paper I wrote claiming that Wittgenstein and Heidegger reached a very similar conclusion: Catanzaro "Die Welt in Heidegger und Wittgenstein (Motivational letter to the University of Cologne)

⁴² For instance both Kant and Wittgenstein although claiming that rationality cannot express the object of metaphysics, neither of them elaborated a version of C2. The former by upholding an agnostic stance on the existence of the noumenon [the speculated object in itself] the latter by proclaiming silence and the impossibility to think and thence to communicate the purported objects of metaphysics.

⁴³ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by Michael Beaney, Oxford University Press, 2023, proposition 6.45.

⁴⁴ In the contemporary field of epistemology, especially after the publication of the influential paper by Gettier which problematized an understanding dating back to Plato's dialogue *Meno*, the discussion is

So many points are implied in C2 and seem suspicious and arbitrary so that I shall analyze them with caution thoroughly and one by one to try to unravel them. Now that we have seen that behind Heidegger's *meditative thought* was lying hidden a whole metaphysical theory, we must ask ourselves what lies behind his peculiar conclusion that C2. Could it be that Heidegger is not interested in preserving rationality or that he is even opposed to science *tout court*? While a thinker like Wittgenstein too appreciates the arts as a medium to apprehend (albeit non-cognitively) the purported object of metaphysics⁴⁵, he maintains those different disciplines clearly distinguished. Heidegger, on the other hand, shows to base his conclusion on a general *romantic* anti-rationalistic historical narrative, resembling Nietzsche's ideological project addressed to Wagner (1813-1883), contained within *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of the Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872). Here there is not simply a claim for the arts to be capable of expressing some higher insight on existence, here Art itself rivals science in the hierarchy of discourse.

In attempting to dissect the points embedded in C2 it appears we have only scratched the surface of a far greater issue. Art as a set of creative disciplines, clearly separated by i.e. religion or science and being the expression of the unique creativity of an individual genius, is clearly a modern idea – in this sense there was no Art in the Middle Ages⁴⁶. Because Wittgenstein defends rationality (and modernity) he finds no problem in enjoying Art as historically received and appropriately separated from other disciplines, without feeling the need to oppose it with science or to confuse it. Whereas the first Nietzsche, the *Schopenhauerian* philosopher-artist⁴⁷ and classical philologist, the (also) Schopenhauerian artist Wagner and finally Heidegger the conservative philosopher, who started

dominated by defining knowledge as Justified True Belief + a non-Gettierized condition. Cf. Gettier, Edmund. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*, vol. 23, no. 6, 1963, pp. 121–123.

⁴⁵ And he too is critical of science by clearly believing it will never be able to address problems such as the meaning of life.

⁴⁶ For additional information on the evolution of aesthetics Cf. the work of the mediaevist Andreas Speer e.g. Andreas Speer, "Art as Liturgy. Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis and the Question of Medieval Aesthetics", in: J. Hamesse (ed.), *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae mediaevalis* (Louvain-la-Neuve: 1998), 855-75.; Speer, "Beyond Art and Beauty. In Search of the Object of Philosophical Aesthetics", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (2000), 73-88.; Speer, "Aesthetics", in: J. Marenbon (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: 2012), 661-84.

⁴⁷ Heidegger addresses him in this façon in particular in the homonymous titanic work Cf. Heidegger. *Nietzsche*. Translated by David Farrell Krell, Vol. I, HarperOne, 1991, Chapter 1, "The Will to Power as Art," p. 3.

his career as a student of catholic theology and culminated as an apologist of the Third Reich – clearly do not intend to protect rationality and unequivocally reject the *modern world*. For this reason I contend that they cannot limit themselves to *enjoy Art as historically received*, but feel they must try to rebuild it as it was, before rationality dominated. But, as we will see, by primarily evaluating the first Nietzsche’s narrative as exemplary, the pre-modern world these people aspire to reach is not the world immediately preceding the Enlightenment or what we understand as the modern age, but an epoch in a very remote past viz. Pre-Socratic Greece.

Couldn’t it be that the *very remote past* is but a fictitious narrative device to allow the unleash of the most arbitrary fantasies of the narrators – and thus it would reveal in their crudity the subjects’ primary goals? My first argument is based on the simple question of why a subject S should intend to access a time T, especially a T so remotely distant and arguably unrelated (2424 years ago); second, S intending T implies a goal and necessarily reveals some need of S; third, it has been noted⁴⁸ that the genre of science fiction (regarding a future T in this case) has been used as a form of escapism from present situations (e.g. totalitarian dictatorship).

Furthermore the intention to access T, I clarify it as the intention to access a world where philosophy was still imbued with poetry and hence to access an intermediate age. This period was also dominated by authoritarian constitutions, this should not be a surprise as Nietzsche has been throughout his *œuvre* unapologetically anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian and a promoter of *aristocratic values*⁴⁹. In *The Antichrist (Der Antichrist, 1895)*, an essential work⁵⁰, he criticizes *endless philosophical inquiry* and sanctions

⁴⁸ Berkeley Fiction Review. “Escaping into Reality: The Importance of Fictional Truth.” *Berkeley Fiction Review*. <https://berkeleyfictionreview.org/2021/12/10/escaping-into-reality-the-importance-of-fictional-truth>. Accessed 23 March 2025.

⁴⁹ Jacques Bouveresse. *Les foudres de Nietzsche et l’aveuglement des disciples*. 2021. “Et d’un point de vue politique, cette tendance à l’égalisation serait le vestibule du processus de démocratisation qui affecte l’époque moderne. Or, dans sa vision politique, Nietzsche affirme le droit des hommes les plus forts à dominer les plus faibles et justifie ce privilège comme une condition nécessaire pour qu’il y ait des droits. La supériorité de l’esprit rend ces hommes les plus forts, c’est pourquoi il n’y a rien d’arbitraire dans leur condition privilégiée, condition que d’ailleurs ils n’ont pas choisie.”

⁵⁰ I consider it as such since it was one of the final statements of his career and the crucial part of his first projected, later abandoned major work entitled *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)*, it represented his *revaluation of all values (Umwertung aller Werte)* and was conceived as a *gospel of the future*.

various religious systems as necessary for societies to function properly and to be the creation of philosophers who through benign lies [dogmas] justify social stratification.⁵¹

In conclusion, the authors' intention to access T (the time of the Pre-Socratic) I contend, characterizes them as reactionaries rejecting the values promoted by Western civilization for more than 2000 years and that in order to mask their radical *rebellion* against our civilization they need to employ a very remote and senseless T. The process which according to Habermas⁵² will lead to modernity was already at play in Ancient Greece and the realm of myth was already starting to be separated from that of reason. Art although not fully developed as an independent discipline, in the form of poetry was clearly being distinguished from epistemic inquiry. The fact that the very first individuals historians denote as philosophers still had poetic elements is employed in Heidegger's theorizing, specifically in the decisive C2, as purported epistemic justification of non-rational claims which are not differentiated from mythology⁵³. Thus, the reference to the Pre-Socratics leveraged by Heidegger, Nietzsche and other related thinkers, is shown to be a mere rhetorical artifice designed to legitimize reactionary worldviews^{54 55} and I declare consequently their views to be pseudo-scientific and pseudo-philosophical.

⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Anti-Christ: Attempt at a Critique of Christianity*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. 1895. § 55-60.

⁵² Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Lecture IX.

⁵³ As noticed by Kellerer Heidegger already in 1916 harbored the ambition of opposing rationalism, without yet losing the epistemic status. Cf. Sidonie Kellerer, "Kampf der Besinnung," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 63, no. 5 (2015): 945. "Ich weiß heute, daß es eine Philosophie des lebendigen Lebens geben darf – daß ich dem Rationalismus den Kampf bis aufs Messer erklären darf – ohne dem Bannstrahl der Unwissenschaftlichkeit zu verfallen – ich darf es – ich muss es."

⁵⁴ Kellerer, "Kampf der Besinnung," 953. "Die indirekte Sprache Heideggers dient der selektiven Ausrichtung auf Hörer und Leser. Sie propagiert eine ‚Besinnung‘, der es nicht darum geht, die Welt im argumentativen Austausch besser zu verstehen, sondern darum, die erwählten Adressaten zu beschwören und zu transformieren. Wahres Denken versteht sich nicht mehr im aufklärerischen Sinne als ‚Erkenntnis‘, sondern als ‚Wissen‘, das sich durch „Herrschaft und Entscheidung“ auszeichnet. Heidegger propagiert ein Denken, dessen Aufgabe es ist, die Macht des Seins „wiederzubeleben“ oder zu „erwecken“. Es geht um die „Eröffnung des Seins“, die Ermächtigung ist, und dementsprechend enthält das wahre Denken auch „nichts Widerlegbares“."

⁵⁵ Kellerer, "Kampf der Besinnung," Ibidem "Jeanne Hersch, die zeitweise bei Heidegger studierte, erinnerte sich an den Lehrer, der sein Denken nicht „unserem freien Urteil“ unterbreitete, sondern es aufzwang. Zugehörigkeit, Erweckung und Verehrung sind Heideggers Leitworte. „Besinnung ist ein Anderes als ‚Vernunft‘ und Rechnung: sie ist Verehrung des Wunders des Seins, ist Stiftung des Adels des großen Da-seins“. Sie ist nicht das Ergebnis der Auseinandersetzung in logisch nachvollziehbaren Argumenten, sondern das Ergebnis einer der Scholle verhafteten Stammesgemeinschaft, die sich als geschichtlich weiß und sich zur Ermächtigung berufen glaubt."

3.2 Foucault's Nietzscheanism

We have already introduced Nietzsche's philosophy in the preceding critique, yet we only contemplated it in its own reactionary implications namely the ideological project motivating *The Birth of Tragedy* and the sanction of traditional worldviews e.g. mythologies. These aspects supposedly do not interest Foucault, whose main use of Nietzschean philosophy is of a genealogical *passive* nihilism. Indeed, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* does not have simply the aim of showing the *complex, mundane, inglorious origins—in no way part of any grand scheme of progressive history*⁵⁶ of the received morals. The *pars destruens* showing the genealogical mundane origins of what is currently considered good and evil, it is not purely deployed to equanimously reject both as somewhat invalid or false. The underlying aristocratic subjective stance cannot be ignored.

Nietzsche's philosophy is full of contradictions and it should not surprise if Foucault's methodology inherits them. The underpinning of Foucault's genealogy is Nietzsche's historical nominalism. I shall try to formalize in the subsequent lines:

Nietzsche's theory is conceivably built upon Kantian metaphysics.

KANTIAN METAPHYSICS (K) We can only know entities as they appear to us [phenomena] and never as they are in themselves [noumena].

To which he wondered, if we cannot know what entities actually are, what is then the source of the normativity of objective truth? If all that it is knowable are purely subjective perspectives, constitutively unable to penetrate the objective truth, then what our purported objective truth really is?

To which he answered that the objective truth is simply the subjective truth of some subject S which successfully prevailed over other perspectives at time T (historical element of his theory). And that the normativity of this inter-subjectively imposed ultimately subjective truth are power relations.

So we may try to reconstruct Nietzsche's theory in the following manner:

⁵⁶ Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, § "Archaeology and Genealogy," Stanford University, last modified September 22, 2021, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#ArchGene>.

Ca. So-called objective truth is the result of the inter-subjective prevailing of some subjective perspective.

Cβ. The prevailing of a subjective perspective is regulated by power relations. (viz. by the effective capacity of S to influence their environment.)

Cγ. The nature of reality appears then as the expression of S's drive for self-expansion. (viz. the Will to power)

One of the main weaknesses of Nietzsche's theory is the denial of the possibility to apprehend an objective external reality, independent from a S's intention and consequent manipulation. His theory reduces the world to power relationships, far for being only one aspect of reality it represents the nature of every phenomena. As Habermas argued^{57 58} these philosophers are still working within the same paradigm of an abstract monadic subject⁵⁹; the impossibility to refer, autonomously and independently from power interests and performances, to an objective truth is a claim that has been objected by several philosophers and by Habermas too; he proposes in particular a new paradigm of inter-subjective free agreement, grounded on communicative rationality, as a solution to the issue⁶⁰. Nietzsche's theory ultimately eliminates the possibility of knowing how things are objectively, his mistake I argue is the result of having gone too far with his consequence: realizing that every subject pertains to a power relation intrinsically in all situations, he concluded that everything can finally be reduced to power⁶¹ alone.

⁵⁷ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, vii. "His strategy is to return to those historical "crossroads" at which Hegel and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche, and Heidegger made the fateful decisions that led to this outcome; his aim is to identify and clearly mark out a road indicated but not taken: the determinate negation of subject-centered reason by reason understood as communicative action."

⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, x-xi. "The key to Habermas's approach is his rejection of the "paradigm of consciousness" and its associated "philosophy of the subject" in favor of the through-and-through intersubjectivist paradigm of "communicative action." This is what he sees as the road open but not taken at the crucial junctures in the philosophical discourse of modernity. At one such juncture, Hegel chose instead to overtrump the subjectivism of modern philosophy with a notion of Absolute Knowledge, itself fashioned after the model of self-consciousness."

⁵⁹ Notwithstanding Foucault's visceral critique of this idea in turn founded on Heidegger's Cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*

⁶⁰ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *ibidem*.

⁶¹ Power, which is already a hardly definable ambivalent concept was sanctioned by Nietzsche as a meta-physical concept turning matters even more nebulously.

This leads to clear contradictions, for if that was the case communication itself would not be possible and he could not at all express his arguments; the fact itself of him being able to successfully communicate a thoughts it qualifies as a rebuttal of his own theory; the realization that every subject interprets differently a word within language according to their situation, it does not imply that inter-subjective understanding is illusory, but only that abstract concepts are contingently adapted but not reduced to their contingency⁶². If the theory of Nietzsche was correct it would become unintelligible. His (and his followers) assumption of a philosophical stance apparently independent from the criticized power relations, yet expressed rationally as if this wasn't too an expression of power and unjustified coercion, and clearly of subjectivist rationalism directly or indirectly, I agree with Habermas' argument that is indeed invalid. If all that is it is mere will to power, how can I express this truth about the world? If every proposition has potentially the same value and only receives validity through verbal or physical manipulation, then every philosophical argument is impossible, even arguing that everything reduces to power, no argument at all would be possible but only arbitrary propositions.

⁶² As comparably Habermas maintains Cf. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, x. "[...] he readily agrees with Foucault that reason is a "thing of this world." But for him this does not obviate the distinctions between truth and falsity, right and wrong; nor does it make them simply equivalent to what is de facto acceptable at a given time and place. The undeniable "immanence" of the standards we use to draw these distinctions - their embeddedness in concrete languages, cultures, practices - should not blind us to the equally undeniable "transcendence" of the claims they represent - their openness to critique and revision and their internal relation to intersubjective recognition brought about by the "force" of reasons. The ideas of reason, truth, justice also serve as ideals with reference to which we can criticize the traditions we inherit; though never divorced from social practices of justification, they can never be reduced to any given set of such practices. The challenge, then, is to rethink the idea of reason in line with our essential finitude - that is, with the historical, social, embodied, practical, desirous, assertive nature of the knowing and acting subject - and to recast accordingly our received humanistic ideals."

4. Conclusion

We have analyzed in depth an argument (HA) part of Habermas' critique of postmodernism and after having evaluated independently two postmodern claims (viz. those by Heidegger and Foucault) in order to test the soundness of HA we have determined affirmatively that postmodern methodology is invalid. We can conclude with an additional Habermas' argument, that the many defects of rationality can only be made good by further rationality⁶³.

⁶³ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. xvii: "In sum, then, Habermas agrees with the radical critics of enlightenment that the paradigm of consciousness is exhausted. Like them, he views reason as inescapably situated, as concretized in history, society, body, and language. Unlike them, however, he holds that the defects of the Enlightenment can only be made good by further enlightenment. The totalized critique of reason undercuts the capacity of reason to be critical. It refuses to acknowledge that modernization bears developments as well as distortions of reason. Among the former, he mentions the "un-thawing" and "reflective refraction" of cultural traditions, the universalization of norms and generalization of values, and the growing individuation of personal identities - all prerequisites for that effectively democratic organization of society through which alone reason can, in the end, become practical."

5. Bibliography

Aylesworth, Gary. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2021 Edition. Stanford University, 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/> (accessed March 15, 2025).

Bouveresse, Jacques. *Les foudres de Nietzsche et l'aveuglement des disciples*. 2021.

Catanzaro, Ivan. *La topologia del primo Heidegger*. Academia.edu, 2024. https://www.academia.edu/125139930/La_topologia_del_primo_Heidegger_Ivan_Catanzaro [in Italian].

Catanzaro, Ivan. "Die Welt in Heidegger und Wittgenstein" (Motivational letter to the University of Cologne).

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire." *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 140. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Gutting, Gary. "Michel Foucault." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, § "Archaeology and Genealogy," Stanford University, last modified September 22, 2021, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#ArchGene>.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.

Heidegger, Martin. "Nietzsche's Word: 'God Is Dead,'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977, Part 2, 31.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot," in Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe Band 5*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, 267.

Heidegger, Martin. *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)*, Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 16, 519.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche*. Translated by David Farrell Krell, Vol. I. HarperOne, 1991, Chapter 1, "The Will to Power as Art," p. 3.

Keller, Pierre. "Thinking (Denken)." In *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, edited by Eric S. Nelson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Kellerer, Sidonie. "Kampf der Besinnung." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 63, no. 5 (2015): 945-953.

Lichtenstein, Daniel. "Explanation and Evaluation in Foucault's Genealogy of Morality." *European Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (September 2023): 732, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12809>.

Malpas, Jeff. *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ: Attempt at a Critique of Christianity*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. 1895. §§ 55-60.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

Sherratt, Yvonne. "Foucault," in *Theory of Genealogy*, Part II: The Tradition of Genealogy, in *Continental Philosophy of Social Science: Hermeneutics, Genealogy, and Critical Theory from Greece to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 143-148.

Speer, Andreas. "Art as Liturgy. Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis and the Question of Medieval Aesthetics." In *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae mediaevalis*, edited by J. Hamesse, 855-75. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998.

Speer, Andreas. "Beyond Art and Beauty. In Search of the Object of Philosophical Aesthetics." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (2000), 73-88.

Speer, Andreas. "Aesthetics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, edited by J. Marenbon, 661-84. Oxford, 2012.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by Michael Beaney. Oxford University Press, 2023, proposition 6.45.

6. Declaration of academic integrity

I hereby confirm that the present paper

Are postmodern philosophies methodologically invalid? An assessment of Habermas' argument

is the result of my own independent scholarly work, and that in all cases material from the work of others (in books, articles, essays, dissertations, and on the internet) is acknowledged, and quotations and paraphrases are clearly indicated. No material other than that listed has been used. I have read and understood the Institute's regulations and procedures concerning plagiarism.

Ivan Catanzaro, 27/03/2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Catanzaro', with a stylized, cursive script.